

Needham Human Rights Committee Minutes

15 January 2015

Present: Marlene Schultz (chair), Abdul Cader Asmal. Barry Ehrlich, Cynthia Ganung, Ashok Mehta, Bud Schram, Jeremy Sutherland, Mike Vaughn

Guests: Jo Crawford, Lucy Noyes

1. Minutes

- Minutes of December 18, 2014 HRC meeting approved.

2. Old Business

- New Members: The formal appointments of Barry Ehrlich and Jeremy Sutherland have been completed. There are a couple of more town residents who have expressed some interest in the work of the Committee. Marlene and Cynthia will keep in touch with them.
- Web Page: Ashok showed a draft of the web page. It is still a work in progress.

3. Reports

- MLK Celebration January 19, 2015 (next Monday): Cynthia has contacted several establishments in town that will provide food and beverages for refreshment before the main program. Some members of the Committee will pick up these donations and bring them to the High School. Refreshments will be served starting at 9:30 am and the main program will start at 10 am. This year's program will be centered around children and youth activities.
- Immigration Justice Task Force: (Cynthia): The group will have a welcoming event at the Chambers Street meeting room for newcomers to Needham. One main focus of the task force is the issue of wage theft, especially from undocumented immigrants. The task force is aware of many examples of this, and working to develop a plan of action.
- Diversity Committee (Cynthia): The committee is sponsoring a meeting on March 26 at the library with Debby Irving, author of the book "Waking Up White". The group will also be sponsoring a Social Justice Film Series in the Fall (also at the library)
- Needham High School (Jeremy): There is a group at the high school addressing issues of cultural proficiency; possible events and actions are under discussion.

4. New Business

- Request from a High School Student: An 11th grade student at Needham High School sent a long letter addressed to the Committee discussing some issues confronting students at NHS who come from other countries. Among these issues are the US-centric

structuring of history courses and some of the obsolete views of the rest of the world propagated in these courses. The Committee agreed that we should invite this student to discuss these issues with the Committee, schedules permitting.

- Domestic Violence: Jo Crawford is a Needham resident who runs an organization, Web of Benefit, which provides self-sufficiency grants to survivors of domestic violence (the organization has a website <http://www.webofbenefit.org/>). She was invited to give the Committee a perspective on various aspects of domestic violence that she is familiar with through her work as Founder and Executive Director of Web of Benefit. She noted that one in four women will experience domestic violence in the course of a lifetime, and this statistic does not vary widely over factors such as race, ethnicity, income or other socioeconomic factors. She explained some of the obstacles facing women, especially, trying to escape the environment in which the violence is occurring and the lack of housing for these women.

The Committee found the discussion very helpful and informative, and will discuss at the next meeting possible actions and events that it might take to support the campaign against domestic violence, which is also a violation of human rights.

Next Meeting: February 26, 2015 (Recorder: Marlene)

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 PM.

Recorder: Mike Vaughn